DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 894 HE 029 838

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TITLE Public Administration Education. How Is It Perceived by Practitioners?
PUB DATE 13 Nov 96
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented in the Staff Seminar of the Department of Public Policy and Managerial Studies, De Montfort University (Leicester, England, United Kingdom, November 13, 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Education; Curriculum Development; *Curriculum Research; *Degree Requirements; Doctoral Programs; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Longitudinal Studies; Masters Programs; Public Administration; *Public Administration Education; *Public Policy; Statistical Analysis
IDENTIFIERS *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This paper presents preliminary findings of an ongoing research survey of 386 senior local and 59 central public administration practitioners in Britain, and used a modified survey instrument initially used at Kentucky State and Indiana State Universities. After setting out some of the similarities and differences between public administration degree programs in the United States and Britain, the paper presents preliminary data based on the first 50 mail responses. The research sought to determine whether British public administrators are familiar with programs being offered in Britain, what core beliefs they hold as to the study and practice of public administration, what managerial skills they consider most important, what level of importance they assign to various components of a public administration program, how relevant public administrative expertise is vis-a-vis other public sector needs, and how relevant research activity is to actual practice. Nine data tables present information on participant profiles; how often training programs were used; how familiar survey participants were with programs; how familiar they were with public administration journals; attitudinal orientation toward public service professionalism; and perceived importance of managerial skills, of courses taught, of saliency of public policy issues. (CH)

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ED 402 894

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION EDUCATION

HOW IS IT PERCEIVED BY PRACTITIONERS?

By

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A working paper prepared for presentation in the staff seminar of the Department of Public Policy and Managerial Studies, De Montfort University.

November 13, 1996 (12.30 p.m.)

* This working paper presents the preliminary findings of an ongoing collaborative survey research by the authors. Mary Richmond of Indiana State University provided Trans-Atlantic Electronic Support Services in revising the original American survey instrument for use in Britain. The authors are grateful to Mrs Urmila Mohapatra for assistance in data analyses, to Maryla Istance and Mary Daniel for secretarial support.

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ABSTRACT

As Public Administration Faculty we need the perspectives of practitioners in order to meet the changing employment demands and to ensure that our teaching remains relevant. Public Administration Degree Programs need systematic data about the orientations of Public Administration Practitioners about the curricular components of Public Administration Education in order to maintain their contemporaneity and relevance. Using a modified version of the survey instruments used in two American Universities (Kentucky State University and Indiana State University) the researchers at De Montfort University are conducting a postal survey of 386 Senior Local and 59 Central Public Personnel Managers in Britain. The survey instrument used seeks to identify the familiarity and attitudinal orientations of these Public Administration Practitioners about Public Administration Education. This working paper, based only upon preliminary data from 50 Local Authority Officers in England, Scotland and Wales, reports some emerging trends in this data set. Data analysis for this project is continuing. A comprehensive paper will be presented at the 1997 Teaching Public Admin Conf., Richmond, Va, May 8-10, 1997 with a view to final publication in an American journal.

INTRODUCTION

US-UK Perspectives

1. The University and college-based degree programs in Public Administration in USA have undergone significant curricular changes in the last two decades. A major reason for these changes has been the inputs received from Public Administration practitioners about employers' needs concerning contents on Public Administration degree programs. American Universities have utilized diverse techniques to obtain inputs from the Public Administration practitioner. These may include formation of advisory boards and committees upon which the practitioners are invited to serve, involvement of practitioners as lecturers/part-time faculty, and systematic surveys of the practitioners about the Public Administration curricular changes. This approach which involves establishing linkages between the Public Administration degree programs and the Public Administration practitioner seems useful from many perspectives. Firstly, it results in faculty and academic administrators' awareness of the types of managerial skills, knowledge base and attitudinal orientations that may be required by the Public Administration graduates if they are to be effective in the future workplace. Secondly, these types of linkages also enabled pre-service Public Administration students to understand the demands likely to be expected of them by key persons in their future work environment.

2. When compared with the United States system of Higher Education, the British Universities offer only a small number of degree programs in Public

Administration/Public Policy. This is particularly true at Masters level, where many American students return to academic study in order to increase or enhance skills already gained from initial employment.

3. British Universities offering Public Administration degree programs also seek out the view of Public Administration practitioners to enrich their curriculum contents. As in the USA consultative committees composed of practitioners from key sectors are quite widely used, as is the use of practitioners as part-time lecturers, visiting Professors, and members of program validation panels. The tradition of many first degrees in Public Administration to offer a sandwich placement (internship) also helps to ensure that courses remain vocationally relevant. There has also been considerable employer input into course design, especially within BTEC programmes. In 1992 a survey conducted by CNAA, later developed by Greenwood and Eggins (1995) analysed curriculum developments within the discipline. However there is no available documentation surveying practitioner views, other than small case-studies concerning the adoption of competency-based models of on-the-job training.

4. It is no less important in Britain than in the USA to ensure that programs remain vocationally relevant and meet employer needs. In recent times these needs have changed considerably as the nature of the public sector has itself changed, and as technological and environmental factors have also required new skills and perspectives. Higher education in the UK has also undergone significant change, and it is relevant for this reason also to ensure that sensitivity to employer needs has

been retained.

Despite the differences between Public Administration programs in the two countries, one point at which the curricular contents of public administration programs in Britain and the USA are comparable is the core area of managerial knowledge and skills development. This offers a useful point for comparing/contrasting developments.

These situational factors provided the setting of this research. One of the participants in this project has worked in various American Universities as a Public Administration faculty. In this context, he was also involved in different research projects involving the surveys of American Public Administrations about Public Administration degree programs. The other two researchers have long experience as Public Administration teachers and writers in the UK. Both worked closely with the main validating bodies influencing the development of the discipline in recent decades; one as a BTEC moderator, the other as panel member of the CNAA until its abolition in 1992.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

By surveying practitioner views about public administration education it is possible not only to assess the relevance of programs in the UK, but also at a later stage in the research to develop comparative perspectives between Britain and USA. However, the specific research questions addressed in this paper are:

1. How familiar are British Public Administrators about Public Administration

programs offered by Universities in Britain?

2. What are some of the core beliefs the British Public Administrators about the practice and study of Public Administration?

3. Which managerial skills and competencies are considered important by Public Administration practitioners?

4. What is the level of importance of various components of Public Administration courses, as perceived by practising Public Administrators?

5. What is the relevance of public administration expertise in Universities to wider public sector training needs?

6. How revelant is the research activity of British academics in public administration to senior practitioners in the field?

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

In this research, findings are based on the responses of high level local Public Administrators serving in the local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales resulting from a postal survey.

During the month June/July 1996 the Scottish Office, Welsh Office and Department of the

Environment were requested to provide an up to date list of the local authorities in Britain. These 3 databases resulted in compilation of a list of 386 Local Authority Chief Executives. In September 1996 the Office of Public Service of the Cabinet office of the Central Government provided a list of 59 high level administrators who serve as the Heads of Human Resources/Central Personnel Management office of government agencies. These 445 individuals were mailed a 7 page questionnaire with both open and closed-ended items. This working paper is based upon the first 50 responses of local authority officers only. The final paper delivered at conference and submitted for publication will contain the full analysis. Although the questionnaires were mailed to the Chief Executives, some of these CEOs passed them on to the Human Resources/Personnel and other local authority officers.

It is accepted that the British public sector is diverse, and that attitudes held by practitioners in one sector (e.g. local government) might not coincide with those from other sectors (e.g. health). While at a later stage, the project might be extended to obtain views representative of the public sector as a whole, it is felt that the survey conducted here - covering senior executives in both local and central government - is nevertheless a most useful exercise.

PRELIMINARY TABULATIONS

In this paper a series of tabular presentations have been provided for a general discussion of these findings in this staff seminar.

Table No. 1

PROFILE OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

(N = 50)

Gender		
Men	82%	(41)
Women	18%	(9)
Total 100% (50)		

Ethnicity
None of the respondents self-identified as ethnic minority

Experience in Public Sector		
6-10 years	10%	(5)
10-15 years	14%	(7)
16-20 years	8%	(4)
20+ years	68%	(34)
Total 100%		

Respondents' Contacts with PA Programs		
Individuals Reporting Contacts with PA Programs	30%	(15)
No Contacts Reported	40%	(20)
No Response	30%	(15)
Total 100%		

Formal titles of Respondents		
Chief Executive Officers	40%	(20)
Personnel Officers	22%	(11)
Other Officers	38%	(19)
Total 100% (50)		

General Educational Background		
Less than Bachelor's degree	6%	(3)
Bachelor's degree	32%	(16)
LL.B	4%	(2)
Master's degree	22%	(11)
Post Graduate Diploma	24%	(12)
Ph.D	8%	(4)
Total 100%		

Public Administration Education		
A University degree Diploma in Public Administration/ Public Policy	22%	(11)
*Other Managerial degree Diploma	36%	(18)
No Public Administration) Education) Non-degree) Public Administration) Education/Managerial) Education)	42%	(21)
Total 100%		

*Other managerial degrees/diplomas education/training reported includes MBA, DMA, DMS, M.Phil, MSC, CIPFA, Cabinet Office Top Management Program etc.

Table No. 2

REPORTED UTILIZATION OF INSTITUTIONS FOR OFFICER/COUNCILLOR TRAINING PROGRAMS*
(N = 50)

	OFFICER TRG				
TYPE OF INSTITUTIONS	Never	Infrequently	Frequently	Very Frequently	Row Total
Civil Service College	82% (41)	12% (6)	0%	4% (2)	100%
Provincial Employer Organisations	10% (5)	38% (19)	44% (22)	8% (4)	100%
Universities	6% (3)	62% (31)	22% (11)	2% (1)	100%
Private Consultants	0%	46% (23)	46% (23)	2% (1)	100%
In-House Facility	0%	8% (4)	36% (13)	48% (24)	100%
	COUNCILLOR TRG				
Civil Service College	84% (42)	0%	0%	0%	100%
Provincial Employer Organisation	24% (12)	50% (25)	16% (8)	4% (2)	100%
Universities	34% (17)	44% (22)	6% (3)	0%	100%
Private Consultants	6% (3)	66% (33)	18% (9)	0%	100%
In-House Facility	4% (2)	24% (12)	54% (27)	20% (10)	100%

*This table is based upon the responses of 50 local authority officers to two questions about their utilization of institutions for "officer training" and "councillor training". Missing responses have been merged in the row totals.

Table No. 3

REPORTED FAMILIARITY OF THE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS WITH PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROGRAMS

(N = 50)*

UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS	LEVEL OF REPORTED FAMILIARITY WITH PROGRAMS			
	Familiar	Somewhat Familiar	Not Familiar	Row Total
BTEC courses in Public Administration/Public Sector Studies	40% (20)	34% (17)	22% (11)	100%
BA/BSc (Hons) in Public Administration/ Policy Studies	34% (17)	50% (25)	14% (7)	100%
MA in Policy Studies	30% (15)	32% (16)	34% (17)	100%
MBA (with Public Sector Components)	62% (31)	32% (16)	4% (2)	100%
Post-Graduate Diploma in Public Administration (DPA)	26% (13)	38% (19)	34% (17)	100%

*This tabulation is based upon 50 preliminary responses. The non-response cases have been added in the row totals.

Table No. 4

PRACTITIONERS' FAMILIARITY WITH JOURNALS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION*

Journals in the Field of Public Administration	Familiar	Somewhat Familiar	Not Familiar	Row Total
British Journal of Political Science	0% (0)	6% (3)	90% (45)	100%
Government and Opposition	0% (0)	12% (6)	86% (43)	100%
Local Government Chronicle	92% (46)	6% (3)	0% (0)	100%
Local Government Review	52% (26)	28% (14)	14% (7)	100%
Local Government Studies	30% (15)	28% (14)	42% (21)	100%
Municipal Journal	82% (41)	18% (9)	0% (0)	100%
Parliamentary Affairs	16% (8)	22% (11)	60% (30)	100%
Policy and Politics	4% (2)	18% (9)	78% (39)	100%
Political Studies	2% (1)	10% (5)	70% (35)	100%
Political Quarterly	4% (2)	18% (9)	74% (37)	100%
Public Administration	16% (8)	58% (29)	34% (17)	100%
Public Money and Management	12% (6)	42% (21)	44% (22)	100%
Public Policy and Administration	4% (2)	24% (12)	66% (33)	100%
Teaching Public Administration	0% (0)	4% (2)	80% (40)	100%

*This table shows the responses of 50 Local Authority Officials to the following survey questions. Non-response cases have been added to the row totals.

How familiar are you with current writings in the following Public Administration Journals in Britain? (Please tick each item).

Table No. 5

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIVE ACADEMICS' FAMILIARITY WITH JOURNALS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION*

(N = 56)

Journals in the Field of Public Administration	Familiar	Somewhat Familiar	Not Familiar	Row Total
British Journal of Political Science	32% (18)	43% (24)	20% (11)	100%
Government and Opposition	34% (19)	45% (25)	16% (9)	100%
Local Government Chronicle	21% (12)	36% (20)	34% (19)	100%
Local Government Review	11% (6)	27% (15)	55% (31)	100%
Local Government Studies	43% (24)	29% (16)	21% (12)	100%
Municipal Journal	16% (9)	25% (14)	52% (29)	100%
Parliamentary Affairs	63% (35)	27% (15)	5% (3)	100%
Policy and Politics	39% (22)	45% (25)	11% (6)	100%
Political Studies	73% (41)	18% (10)	4% (2)	100%
Political Quarterly	48% (27)	41% (23)	4% (2)	100%
Public Administration	93% (52)	4% (2)	0%	100%
Public Money and Management	46% (26)	32% (18)	18% (10)	100%
Public Policy and Administration	57% (32)	20% (11)	18% (10)	100%
Teaching Public Administration	39% (22)	43% (24)	14% (8)	100%

*This table shows the responses of 56 British Professors of Public Administration to a short questionnaire mailed out to them in October 1996.

Table No. 6

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS' ORIENTATIONS TOWARD PUBLIC SERVICE PROFESSIONALISM*

Statements about Public Administrators as Professionals	Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Don't Know	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree	Row Total
A degree of diploma in Public Administration is valuable as a basis for a career in today's public service.	14% (7)	72% (36)	8% (4)	6% (3)	0% (0)	100%
Public Administrators, regardless of their other educational background can benefit from part-time study on university Public Administration courses.	16% (8)	72% (36)	4% (2)	8% (4)	0% (0)	100%
Most good Public Administrators are born, education in the field of Public Administration is not very relevant.	0% (0)	12% (6)	0% (0)	42% (21)	46% (23)	100%
Public Administration/Public Sector management is a useful subject for Public Administrators only if studied at postgraduate level as opposed to undergraduate.	4% (2)	10% (5)	14% (7)	48% (24)	24% 12)	100%
The public sector is at least as efficient as the private sector in delivering local services.	60% (30)	30% (15)	4% (2)	2% (1)	2% (1)	100%

*This table shows the responses of 50 Local Authority Officials to the following questions. Missing cases have been added to the row totals.

Listed below are some statements that have been made about the practice and study of Public Administration. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of these statements. (Please tick each item on a five point scale).

Table No. 7

PRACTITIONERS' PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF MANAGERIAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES FOR PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGERS*

Managerial Skills and Competencies for Public Administrators	Unimportant	A Little Important	Important	Very Important	Extremely Important	Row Total
Assertiveness skills	0% (0)	4% (2)	52% (27)	34% (17)	8% (4)	100%
Commitment to democratic values in workplace	0% (0)	4% (2)	34% (17)	36% (18	24% (12)	100%
Commitment to efficient and effective management	0% (0)	0% (0)	6% (3)	30% (15)	64% (32)	100%
Commitment to public sector ethos	0% (0)	10% (5)	24% (12)	36% (18)	30% (15)	100%
Conceptual skills (e.g. viewing organization as a whole and strategic planning)	0% (0)	0% (0)	28% (14)	38% (19)	34% (17)	100%
Counselling and disciplining employees	0% (0)	10% (5)	56% (28)	28% (14)	6% (3)	100%
Designing research studies or programme evaluations	10% (5)	52% (26)	28% (14)	6% (3)	2% (1)	100%
Evaluating employee productivity	0% (0)	14% (7)	52% (26)	28% (14)	6% (3)	100%
Financial skills	2% (1)	8% (4)	54% (27)	32% (16)	4% (2)	100%
Influencing superiors and peers	0% (0)	4% (2)	38% (19)	38% (19)	20% (10)	100%
Information technology skills (e.g., using WWW, data bases, Internet, web pages)	4% (2)	34% (17)	38% (19)	20% (10)	2% (1)	100%
Interpersonal communication skills	0% (0)	0% (0)	4% (2)	56% (28)	40% (20)	100%
Knowledge of legal processes	4% (2)	58% (29)	40% (20)	8% (4)	0% (0)	100%
Participative decision-making skills	0% (0)	8% (4)	34% (17)	38% (19)	18% (9)	100%
Managing conflict in the work group	0% (0)	8% (4)	42% (21)	30% (15)	20% (10)	100%
Managing cultural diversity in the workplace	6% (3)	20% (10)	34% (17)	30% (15)	10% (5)	100%
Mentoring employees in career development	0% (0)	14% (7)	50% (25)	30% (15)	8% (4)	100%
Numeracy skills (e.g. using mathematical and statistical techniques)	2% (1)	40% (20)	32% (16)	20% (10)	6% (3)	100%
Political skills	0% (0)	4% (2)	14% (7)	40% (20)	42% (21)	100%
Problem solving and decision-making skills	0% (0)	2% (1)	10% (5)	46% (23)	42% (21)	100%
Public presentation skills	0% (0)	8% (4)	24% (12)	50% (25)	18% (9)	100%
Representing your organization to external constituencies	0% (0)	4% (2)	38% (19)	40% (20)	16% (8)	100%
Teamwork building skills	0% (0)	2% (1)	40% (20)	42% (21)	16% (8)	100%
Time management skills	0% (0)	10% (5)	36% (18)	36% (18)	18% (9)	100%

*This table shows the responses of 50 Local Authority Officers to the following survey questions. Missing cases have been added to the row totals.

Listed below are some skills and competencies that have been considered important for public sector managers. In your opinion, how important are each of these for managers in your organization? (Please tick each item as appropriate).

Table No. 8

PRACTITIONERS' PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF COURSES TAUGHT IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION DEGREE PROGRAMS*

Courses in Public Administration Program	Unimportant	A Little Important	Important	Very Important	Extremely Important	Row Total
Administrative Law	2% (1)	26% (13)	54% (27)	10% (5)	2% (1)	100%
Administrative Theories	4% (2)	32% (16)	42% (21)	14% (7)	2% (1)	100%
British Government & Politics	0% (0)	32% (16)	40% (20)	22% (11)	2% (1)	100%
Budgeting/Financial Accounting	0% (0)	10% (5)	36% (18)	42% (21)	6% (3)	100%
Business Studies	2% (1)	4% (2)	50% (25)	32% (16)	8% (4)	100%
Comparative Public Administration and Policy	2% (1)	32% (16)	40% (20)	16% (8)	2% (1)	100%
Development Administration	2% (1)	40% (20)	40% (20)	8% (4)	0% (0)	100%
Environmental Studies	2% (1)	50% (25)	30% (15)	10% (5)	0% (0)	100%
European Union/Policy Making	0% (0)	26% (13)	42% (21)	20% (10)	8% (4)	100%
Information Technology	0% (0)	12% (6)	42% (21)	40% (20)	2% (1)	100%
Local Government/Politics	0% (0)	2% (1)	34% (17)	34% (17)	26% (13)	100%
Managerial Studies	0% (0)	2% (1)	14% (7)	50% (25)	30% (15)	100%
Marketing	0% (0)	26% (13)	54% (27)	16% (8)	0% (0)	100%
Multi-culturalism	8% (4)	46% (23)	28% (14)	14% (7)	0% (0)	100%
Organizational Behaviour	0% (0)	8% (4)	44% (22)	32% (16)	10% (5)	100%
Personnel Management	0% (0)	12% (6)	48% (24)	30% (15)	6% (3)	100%
Policy Analysis	0% (0)	14% (7)	28% (14)	38% (19)	16% (8)	100%
Pressure Groups/Parties/Media	0% (0)	16% (8)	44% (22)	34% (17)	0% (0)	100%
Public Finance	0% (0)	8% (4)	40% (20)	44% (22)	6% (3)	100%
Public Policy Making	0% (0)	6% (3)	32% (16)	52% (26)	6% (3)	100%
Public Sector Ethics	0% (0)	12% (6)	38% (19)	36% (18)	8% (4)	100%
Public Sector Management	0% (0)	0% (0)	30% (15)	48% (24)	20% (10)	100%
Questionnaire Techniques	8% (4)	60% (30)	22% (11)	4% (2)	0% (0)	100%
Sandwich Placements in Public Agencies	4% (2)	26% (13)	26% (13)	18% (9)	20% (10)	100%
Sociology	10% (5)	58% (29)	24% (12)	4% (2)	0% (0)	100%
Social Policy	0% (0)	38% (19)	44% (22)	16% (8)	0% (0)	100%
Statistical Methods	2% (1)	48% (24)	26% (13)	14% (7)	2% (1)	100%
Strategic Management	0% (0)	12% (6)	22% (11)	34% (17)	28% (14)	100%
Gender and Society	14% (7)	46% (23)	24% (12)	8% (4)	0% (0)	100%

*This table shows the responses of 50 Local Authority Officers to the following question. The missing cases have been added to the row totals.

The curriculum for Public Administration degree programmes in British Universities and colleges often include the following courses. based upon your experience as a public administrator, how important are each of these courses for students preparing themselves for a career in public and not-for-profit sectors? (Please tick each item as appropriate).

Table No. 9

PRACTITIONERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE SALIENCE OF PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES*

Public Policy Issues	Unimportant	A Little Important	Important	Very Important	Extremely Important	Row Total
Changing levels of electoral support	4% (2)	24% (12)	46% (23)	16% (8)	6% (3)	100%
Public opinion poll result on policy issues	0% (0)	16% (8)	42% (21)	30% (15)	8% (4)	100%
MPs and their views on policy issues	4% (2)	12% (6)	52% (26)	26% (13)	0% (0)	100%
Councillors' views on policy issues	0% (0)	0% (0)	12% (6)	38% (19)	44% (22)	100%
The local business community and their views on policy issues	0% (0)	0% (0)	26% (13)	44% (22)	26% (13)	100%
Local trade unions and their views on policy issues	8% (4)	12% (6)	36% (18)	28% (14)	14% (7)	100%
Local consumer groups and their views on policy issues	2% (1)	6% (3)	24% (12)	44% (22)	18% (9)	100%
Foreign Affairs	14% (7)	42% (21)	32% (16)	8% (4)	2% (1)	100%
Public sector industrial relations	4% (2)	22% (11)	38% (19)	26% (13)	6% (3)	100%
Ethnic minority groups and their views on policy issues	8% (4)	18% (9)	40% (20)	22% (11)	4% (2)	100%
Equal opportunities legislation	0% (0)	16% (8)	44% (22)	28% (14)	8% (4)	100%
Policy stances of major political parties in Britain	0% (0)	10% (5)	42% (21)	28% (14)	16% (8)	100%
Views expressed in local newspapers on public policy issues	4% (2)	10% (5)	44% (22)	22% (11)	14% (7)	100%
Policy stances in major pressure groups in Britain	0% (0)	34% (17)	54% (27)	14% (7)	4% (2)	100%
Public policy trends in Europe	2% (0)	34% (17)	36% (18)	18% (9)	6% (3)	100%
Public policy trends in the USA	18% (9)	48% (24)	22% (11)	6% (3)	2%	100%

*This table shows the responses of 50 Local Authority Officers to the following survey question. Missing cases have been added in the row totals only.

As a public sector manager, how important do you believe it is to keep currently informed about the following? (Please tick each item as appropriate).

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